

We're The Only One

by RavenRois

Category: HakuÅ•ki/è-„æ;æé-¼

Genre: Adventure, Supernatural

Language: English

Characters: Chizuru Y., Hijikata T., Saito H.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2014-08-17 09:21:27

Updated: 2014-09-17 04:16:22

Packaged: 2016-04-26 21:28:38

Rating: T

Chapters: 5

Words: 15,007

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Saitou joins a group of demon slayers with his adoptive sister, Chizuru. They help each other attain their goals but one day he learns that he's destined to help her reunite with her lover from her past life and that she'd die by his blade as well. Will he be able to do something to change fate, especially when he finally recognizes the feelings he developed for her.

1. Specter of Light

****Specter of Light****

The sun was on the verge of retiring for the day and it doesn't spell well for the hunters who experienced several setbacks on their attempts to reclaim the captured castle. A change of plans was quickly enacted by the commander and the different divisions regrouped and took their new positions. The castle which was taken was well fortified to start with and having a cunning opponent made things challenging but this wouldn't stop the legendary group of demon slayers from ridding the place of its intruders. A couple of crates of gold coins and a free pass to all allied countries of the kingdom were at stake anyway.

The commander went on the edge of the cliff which was overlooking the castle. His eyes keenly observed the assumed positions of their enemy. His raven hair tousled by the breeze as he turned to face the remaining unit behind him. He nodded on the smaller man who stood near him.

"Everyone is in their position." The commander stated, his voice calm but with authority. "Saitou you know what to do"

The smaller man nodded curtly. His hair which covered the right side of his face a bit fluttered a little, away from his pale face, revealing the pair of his icy orbs which was almost the same hue with his deep violet hair. He turned to his subordinates. "Let's go. I'll

enter the fortress first and I'll be followed by the 4th division. That's when you enter next and assume discussed position" The men nodded. Before moving to the front of his small group, he glanced at the young woman whose eyes didn't hide the fact that she was dead worried about him. He led his group down the side of the cliff and acted as planned.

A group of ten men, along with the commander and the young woman, were left on the cliff. They watched closely as the different divisions positioned themselves and started to wreak havoc in the ground below. The commander pulled out his binoculars whose barrels were covered in silver with almost unreadable inscriptions in them. His brows furrowed as he placed down the binoculars.

"Is something wrong?" the woman took a step closer to the commander, looking up at him.

"Why does Kazama always have to defy my orders? That arrogant bastard" he growled.

The woman's brown orbs turned from the commander to the ground below. She pursed a smile knowing that this usually happens but things turn out well in the end. "The 5th division has reached the top walls" she pointed.

The commander watched as the demons guarding the walls got thrown to the ground one after the other. "but I don't think that the 4th division and 2nd division would make it in time to cease the castle from inside. I'd go down for back-up" he grabbed a compound crossbow and handed it to the woman. "You never missed a shot, cover my back" he gave her a small smile.

"Eh?" the woman looked down the crossbow on her arms. She was trained by the commander himself so she should be confident with her marksmanship but she can't help but feel a lump on her throat. Despite the fear in her she wanted to help and so she nodded with conviction. She grabbed the leather pouch filled with arrows and slung it over her shoulder.

"Let's go" the commander lead everyone down the cliff and stopped at one point on the way down the to leave the woman. "Yamazaki" he called one of his trusted men.

"Yes" the young man stepped forward pulling down the metal mask that covered the lower half of his face.

"Stay with Chizuru" with that the commander head off to the battlefield below.

The young woman knelt on one knee, removed the pouch, loaded the bow and rested the butt of the weapon on her shoulder as she prepared to fire. From the scope on her bow she can see that the commander has just stepped into the battlefield. She took a deep breath and let out her first shot, hitting the animal like demon who tried to attack from behind. "Please don't let me miss" she muttered to herself like a mantra as she prepared for the next shot.

"Yukimura, I'd go and get the guests in there" Yamazaki pointed to their right with a thumb. Some demons have managed to locate them.

Chizuru's eyes widened, feeling a bit nervous with the sight of the enemy approaching, but she trusted Yamazaki and his skills. "Be careful" her voice was too sweet in comparison to the growls and moans of the demons nearby.

She focused on covering the commander who has already met with the 4th division and took over the battle outside. She let loose one arrow after another, only stopping for some breather and to reload. On the side of her eye she saw that Yamazaki got pinned down by a demon. Turning to her right she hit the demon with an arrow in between the eyes.

"Thanks" Yamazaki exclaimed as he finished off the last of the demons.

When Chizuru turned her eyes back to the battle field she saw that their groups' flag was already raised on one corner of the castle. From her scope she watched as the commander and the 1st division cleaned up the battlefield. She can't help but feel relieved that finally the battle was over. The sun has already set and the crescent moon was smiling down at them, the victors.

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Soft music from a man with a guitar mixed with the rowdy laughter and voices of men as they toast their mugs of beer or glasses of wine in celebration for their assignments success. There were injured men and a number also lost their lives in the battle but it was a risk that everyone was aware of. Demon slaying is a tough and dirty job but someone has to do it for the sake of the humans who have been in strife with the other kind since everyone can remember.

On the side of the room sat the quite man whose deep violet hair casts a shadow over his pale face. He looked really worn and ready for bed. He pulled his white scarf loose, which stayed immaculately white despite the battle. Looking up, he was greeted with a warm smile and a mug of beer.

"Brother, you look really pale" Chizuru Yukimura sat next to Hajime Saitou who took the mug of beer and took a gulp.

"Don't worry about me" he gave her a curt smile. "I heard that you did well today"

Chizuru shook her head and smiled bashfully. "Not really"

"Don't discredit yourself." He sat up and took another generous gulp.

"I'm sorry." She reached for the pocket of her pants. "Here, I guess this good luck charm helped me"

He received the small gold coin like pendant and hid it in the pocket of his coat. "It does have its own magic" Seeing the pendant reminded him of his mother but he tries not to think about the past that much despite it trying to catch him like a monster in the shadows.

"Why don't we join everyone in theâ€¦" Chizuru was interrupted when a hand pulled her up by the wrist.

The man with a sly smirk on his lips pulled the young woman with him. "Hajime, get up and join us there or I won't return her" he teased.

"Okita" she muttered. Her face got dusted with shades of pink.

"Chi-zu-ru" Okita said playfully and leaned down so that his face would be on the same level as the young woman. "I need you to fix my braid" he pointed at the three rows of already loose braid on the right side of his slightly long layered brown. It wasn't to keep the hair from his face really, if you asked him head tell you it's his style so bug off.

"Alright" she beamed and followed him to the round table in the middle of the room where the other four division captains and the commander sat. She took a seat next to Okita and started to undo his braids. She noticed that Saitou took the seat next to her and refilled his mug off beer. As she fixed Okita's braid, she listened to the conversation the men were having.

"Stop being so tight assed Hijikata" the man with golden hair narrowed his eyes to the raven haired man sitting next to him. "I did my job despite not following a tad bit of your plan. So don't whine"

"Then take my place Kazama" Hijikata, the commander, said with his signature furrowed brows.

"Interesting idea" Kazama crossed his arms.

"Hey! Guys!" the youngest division captain stood in between the two. "Don't fight. I have a good joke which would lighten up your mood" he announced proudly, placing both his hands on his hips.

"Heisuke. Just don't. Please don't" the topless man said shaking his head in disapproval. "You'd make things grim with your jokes"

"But my joke about the fake noodle and fat psychic made you laugh Shinpachi" Heisuke pouted. "You always pick on me, that's why I like Sano more than you"

Okita chuckled. "Yay" so Heisuke plays for the other team now ? Kudos to your undying sex appeal Harada" There was a chorus of laughter from the men, except from Heisuke who turned beet red.

"Souji!" Heisuke exclaimed as he stomped back to his seat.

"Sorry Heisuke. You really have to work on not becoming the prey of our dinner topic." Sano nudged his pal on the side. "But I don't think Heisuke has a thing for me because the other night he confessed something"

"Ah! Yeah" Shinpachi clapped his hand at the memory of the secret the youngster spilled. "I just remembered that he's in love" his words were muffled by Heisuke's hands.

"Jeez" so much for a faithful friend" Heisuke removed his hands

from the man.

"Come on. I won't tell them" Shinpachi grinned. "I was just teasing"

At this point Chizuru has finished fixing Okita's hair. She leaned back on her chair, ate a bit and listened to the men's conversation. She wasn't sure when exactly it was that she felt drowsy and before she knew it she was already snoozing on her chair.

"Oi, Hajime" Souji poked Chizuru's cheek. "She fell asleep"

Kazama got up with a small smile. "I'll carry her"

Hijikata cleared his throat and interrupted Kazama. "Keep your hands to yourself."

Without any words Saitou carried Chizuru in his arms. "Excuse me. I'll take her to her room" he said ducking his head a bit and left after a nod from the commander.

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Saitou was about to put down his adoptive sister on her bed when her eyes fluttered open with a yawn. He laid her down on the bed and sat near her feet.

"You were sleeping soundly so I didn't wake you" he said.

Chizuru sat up with a small smile. "Thank you. I guess I got really tired"

"You should go back to sleep" he was about to get up when Chizuru held on to his wrist.

She can feel her cheeks heat up and she focused on the sheet beneath her instead of his face. "Can you stay till I fall back to sleep?"

He nodded. She lay back down and pulled the blanket over her. Staying with her until she falls asleep is not new to him. When they were younger they'd even share a bed together but she was eighteen and he's twenty. At their age sleeping on the same bed wouldn't sound so right and would be awkward. There are times though when he'd have no choice but stay next to her, especially if she's not feeling good or when she's down or when the weather is awfully bad.

He looked down his adoptive sister, who has already fallen asleep. He can't help but remember the past. Starting from when they first meet to the day he finally fulfilled two of his dreams which were to ride an airship and become a demon hunter. As he closed his eyes, specters of vivid memory played in the theater of his mind.

2. Meeting a Fallen Star

****Meeting a Fallen Star****

It has always been a hobby of his to lay down underneath the moving clouds that decorated that the azure sky both in the morning when his

chores are done and in the afternoon when he is asked by his mother to go out and play but end up spending time on his own.

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_"Hajime, you should really make more friends" he remembers what his mother would always tell him while they eat dinner. It was when they'd exchange stories about their day. He went to school but unlike other kids he'd always head straight home after class. _

At night before going to bed, his mother would tell him stories from the olden days. Like stories about how humans casted the strange beings that used to live alongside them and tagged them as demons. In the stories it was said that men were stronger with the beings around and for some time the two kinds benefited from each other. The true reason for the conflict between the two kinds is still under debate, making it harder to solve the problem which has already taken many lives. His father's life is one of those taken by the demons. His father was a demon hunter and he too dreamt of becoming one. Not for revenge, at first, but because he admired his father's courage and warrior spirit.

_He spotted an air ship passing by. The lights decorating the bottom of the airship shone like stars on the dimming afternoon sky. He got up and gazed at it with amusement. He promised himself in the future when he have enough money he'd ride in it with his mother. A gust of wind passed and tousled the deep violet hair that grew long enough to cover one of his eyes. He placed a hand over his white scarf which hanged loosely around his neck to keep it from fluttering. Closing his eyes a small smile formed on his lips. It had always made him happy to watch airships as they pass. _

_He reached for the sword on the ground next to him. He knew that what he'd gain from practicing on his own is nothing compared to learning from someone directly but he has to start somewhere. With his sword in hand, he started his trek down the hill to return to their town. It was then that he felt the urge to glance back. When he did, he spotted something glow in a flash then it was gone. It was far from where he was, on the other side of the hill in the forest, but he was sure that he saw it. _

_Curiosity pulled his feet to start going the other way. He knew his mother would scold him and worry sick every time he comes home late but he itched to know what was that he saw. His strides turn into a run as he reached the other side of the hill. Shadow has already taken over that part of land but it wasn't impossible to see. Luckily, the probable cause for the light came from an area not too far from the entrance of the forest. The proudly standing grass which spreads on the floor bowed, forming a path leading to something that crashed in the area. _

_The earth beneath him was soft, making it harder to walk faster, and his boots almost got stuck at one point when he stepped over a murky patch of ground. He can feel the hair rise at the back of his neck, excited for the possible discovery that he might make and worried that he might not be able to fend for himself if it turns out to be a demon. He was expecting to see something scary, odd, magical or even grand but his expectations failed him. _

_A couple of feet from him was a girl, curled and unconscious on the ground. He wondered what a girl, probably just a couple of years

younger than him, is doing in the forest floor at this time of day. He took another step forward and shook her by the shoulder. Her eyes lazily fluttered open and her lips were mumbling but no sound came out. _

"Are you alright?" he inquired as he squatted down to see if she was injured in any way.

_"Ahhh!" the girl screamed but stopped abruptly and looked around with both confusion and fear in her eyes. "Where am I?" she looked at the boy before him as she sat up. A groan escaped her lips as she felt a sharp pain on her left arm. _

_"Don't move" he noticed that her arm was a bit swollen, it sure was injured. Removing his scarf, he reached for her arm but she pulled it away with a face twitching in pain. "You'd hurt yourself more if you leave it that way" he reached for her arm again and this time she allowed him to create a makeshift arm support with his scarf. _

She looked down at her arm. "Where am I?" she looked around once more. _

_"In the forest but it's near my town" he got up and noticed that tears started rolling down her face. "Can you stand up?" he offered her a hand and she took it then wiped the tears that stained her cheeks. "What are you doing here on the first place? You don't look like someone who lives in our town" he noted that she was wearing a light pink robe, falling to her ankles. The sleeve on her left arm was in tatters and her outfit is covered with mud and bits of grass. _

"I don't know" she frowned. "I'm scared" she muttered and bit her lip to keep the tears from falling.

_"My mother would probably know what to do with you. Why don't you come with me?" he offered. _

_"Eh?" her chocolate brown eyes widened. "b..but I don't know you" she removed the stray strands of dark hair that stuck on her damp face with the back of her hand. "My father always told me not to go with strangers" _

_"Would you rather stay here then?" he looked up and realized that night has already fallen. _

_"Ah~|No~|I don't want to...It's scary" the small trembling voice came out of her lips. "Please don't leave me" she reached for his sleeve and held on to it. _

_"Then follow me" without another word he lead the girl out the forest, over the hill and into the village to the warm small house near the river which he calls home. _

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_"Saitou Hajime!" it was never good when his mother calls him by his full name. He stood in attention and watched as his mother bathes the young girl on their wooden tub. Of course he wasn't looking but he listened to his mother's chastising. _

_"How many times should I tell you not to stray out far from town? And you even went home late" she continued with a sigh. "I was really worried you know." She poured water over the little girl's head, washing away the bubbled and foam from the soap. _

"I'm sorry" usually his scarf would help hide the frown on his face but it was dirty and he has nowhere to hide his frown in.

"You always say that but do you really mean it" she grabbed a towel and dried the little girl. "And why did you go out with that sword again? Your father told you to use it only when you are old and strong enough to wield it"

_"But by that time I won't be able to gather enough skill to make me a good hunter" he looked at his mother who lifted the little girl, now wrapped in a towel, out of the tub. _

_"I want you to follow your own path but I hope that you forget about being a demon hunter" his mother's voice was marred with sorrow and he didn't liked it one bit. She turned to the little girl and smiled at her. "We'd get you dressed and we'll have dinner alright?" she beamed at the girl who nodded in delight. She led her out the bathroom. "Go get cleaned. We'll talk about this some other time" she said before walking out the door. _

The boy stood looking at the floor for a while. He knew and understood his mother's sentiments about him being a demon hunter but he felt like it was path he should pursue, no matter how treacherous and difficult it may be. _

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_"I forgot to ask you earlier but what's your name?" the boy's mother asked with a smile. The boy watched as his mother dotted on the girl like she was her own. _

The girl dropped her fork on the plate and returned the smile. "Chizuruâ€|Yu-ki-mu-ra Chi-zu-ru" she said in syllables as if to spell them out to the woman._

"Chizuruâ€| that fits you just fine" she beamed. "I'm Ena but you can call me mother" she turned to the boy beside her. "And this here is Hajime"

The girl tilted her head to side confused. "Mo-ther" she muttered.
_

Ena nodded. "I'll go and check the town hall tomorrow for missing children reports. Anyway, do you have any family members we can contact? Or do you know which town or city you lived? The nearest city to our town in a five day travel from here and the nearest town is half a day away, we can send them a notice for a lost girl"_

Chizuru stares blankly at her plate then bit her lip. "Iâ€| can't remember" _

_"Huh?" Ena wondered if she is suffering from memory loss. The poor

thing. _

_"I can't remember anything" the little girl started to sniff and hot tears welled on her eyes. "I can't remember" she started sobbing and looked pained from not being able to remember.

_

_"Mother you made her cry" Hajime stated as he stopped eating.

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_Ena got up and patted the girl's back. "Please don't cry. I'm not really good at making kid's stop crying. Lucky for me Hajime barely cries" she chuckled. _

_"I'm sorry" Chizuru rubbed her eyes with her knuckles. "I'm scared" _

_Ena ran her fingers on her soft dark brown hair. "Why?" _

_"I don't know" she sniffed. _

_"You don't have to be scared, Chizuru" Ena beamed and made the little girl look at her. "You can stay with us till you find your family alright?" _

_"Really?" Chizuru went from sad to glad in a snap. _

_Ena nodded. "Of course. From now on you'll be my daughter" she embraced the girl who was beaming in delight. "and Hajime can be your brother" _

_"Huh?" Hajime almost choked on his food. _

_"You don't have any problems with that right?" Ena then placed both her hands on Chizuru's cheeks and squeezed it till her lips were in a pout. "I mean look at her. She really cute!" _

_Hajime sighed, if his mother wants to adopt the girl then who is he to say no. "It's alright" _

_"Yay! I can't wait to dress you up and style your hair and oh dear" I'm so excited" Ena returned to her seat to resume eating. _

_Chizuru looked across the table. Her eyes fell on the silent boy who is almost finished eating. "Brother" she called him. When he looked up she gave him a warm smile. _

_Hajime looked away from the girl and felt embarrassed to be called brother for the first time. _

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_A week passed and no one came looking or posted an announcement for the missing girl. Hajime haven't told his mother about the light he saw in the area where he found Chizuru but he concluded that he just imagined it. Looking behind him, he saw that Chizuru was trying to catch up with his longer strides. She was panting and red in the cheeks. _

_"__Wait" she grabbed into Hajime's scarf. He held on to it before it got completely pulled away from his neck. "Brother, I thought mother told us to play with the other kids" she looked around. "But there is no one here" _

They were just half way across the small hill but Hajime thinks that Chizuru could use some rest so he sat down on the patch of grass, placing his sword next to him. "I don't have friends to play with"

_"__Huh?" Chizuru sat next to her new brother. It's been a short while but she found herself really fond of him. "Why doesn't brother have any friends? You're really cool" she smoothed her dark blue dress then tucked her knees to herself. _

_"__What made you say that?" he stared up the sky hoping that an airship would pass again. _

_"__Wellâ€|" Chizuru tapped a finger on her lip as she think. "Oh! I saw you practicing with your sword the other day! That's really cool!" she beamed. _

_"__I'm not yet good enough in handling the sword" he paused. "and other kids find me scary" _

_Chizuru leaned closer to him and inspected his face. "Eh? But you don't look scary" _

_He couldn't help but smile. "Thanks" _

_She giggled and tugged his sleeve. "Hey hey!" she pointed at the sky. "It's a rabbit!" _

_He looked at where she was pointing. "That's a bear not a rabbit" _

_"__Ohhhâ€|" she frowned. "But I like rabbits" _

_He sighed as he saw the frown. "Alright then. It's a rabbit" _

_He never thought that she would be quite talkative but he didn't mind. He even thinks that maybe having a sister isn't that bad after all. _

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Hajime stepped a foot forward and sent a series of strong blows at the pillar of wood wrapped with a fair amount of hay. Tightening his left hand's hold on the hilt of his sword, he jumped forward and sliced the wood in half. The hay attached to it, now sliced in different measures, scattered as the wind blew by. He took a breath, maintaining the final stance in which he finished in before going into a passive stance then returned his sword to its sheath. The silence around him was shattered by a clap. He turned around and saw that it was Chizuru.

_"__That was greet!" the girl hopped to him with a smile. "Mother says it's time for lunch. I helped her cook today" _

_Hajime picked up the wood which he cut with his sword, they would

make good firewood. "Sure. I'll follow" with that he watched as she ran back to their home. It's been a year and a half since Chizuru started living with them. She changed the atmosphere of their home and more importantly she became a good companion for his mother. His thoughts were interrupted when the girl tripped forward. Dropping the wood under his arm, he rushed to her side._

_"_Are you alright? You know that you always stumble and fall. You should avoid running like that again" Hajime helped her up._

_Tears welled in her eyes as she dusted the dirt in her hands. She moved her leg and cringed in pain. "Ouchâ€¦" she whispered as she lifted her skirt up to see a wounded knee. _

_"_Don't worry that's just a scratch" he dusted her leg with his hand. "Does your ankle hurt?" he lifted her feet up, making her stumble forward to him. He helped her keep her balance by placing her hand on his shoulder. He moved the foot and when she stiffed, he knew that she sprained her ankle. _

_"_I'm sorry" she muttered as she sniffed back a cry. _

_"_Don't worry about it. We'll fix you when we get home" he got up. "Can you walk?"_

_"_I think so" she took a couple of limping steps before almost falling forward but Hajime caught her. "Thanks" _

_"_I guess I'd have to carry you back" he looked back at the wood he was supposed to bring home. It was a waste but she comes first before anything. He squatted down and looked at her over his shoulder. "Come on" _

_She took another step forward and rode on his back. She was lifted up without any effort. She was quite small after all. She wrapped her arms around his neck, locking them on his chest, and then rested her face next to his. _

_"_Mother won't be happy with this" he muttered. _

_"_I'm sorry" she pouted. There was a long while of silence as they walked back home until she sneezed because his hair tickled her nose. "Excuse me" she giggled._

_"_Don't tell me you're going to catch a cold too" Hajime glanced at her. _

_"_No. It's your hair. We should really trim it." She playfully pulled the tip of his bangs. "Can you still see with this brother?" _

_"_Of course."_

_"_Mother thinks that you'd look better with a clean cut but I think this suits you just fine" she tugged the tip of his bangs again. _

_"_Thank you but please stop that" he said in his usual almost emotionless manner. _

_"__Sorry" she smiled and looked up. "Look it's an airship!"

_

_Hajime stopped and looked up as well. "It is" _

_"__I want to ride that one someday" _

_"__Me too"_

_"__Yey! Then let's all ride the airship alright" she beamed. _

_He adjusted her to keep her from falling from his hold. "Of course"

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_The rest of the day was uneventful but he felt really tired and wanted nothing but to get a shut eye. Hajime paused on his way to his bedroom though when he spotted Chizuru sitting on the bench outside the window. He wondered what she was doing at that time of night and so he went out to check on her. _

_"__Couldn't sleep?" he sat next to her. _

_She almost fell on the ground in surprise. "Brotherâ€|" _

_"__You shouldn't stay out. There have been demon attacks on neighboring towns this past few days and everyone is advised to stay inside their homes ones the sun falls and refrain from going out at night" he leaned back and looked up the sky sprinkled with glittery stars. _

_She can't help but chuckle with the way he spoke. He's always serious and he has the air of a twenty year old man. He would smile and play with her but compared to other kids his age his thoughts on things were always deeper than them. _

_There was a while of silence which was slightly eased by the singing of the crickets and the leaves rustling to the passing wind. "Are you afraid of demons?" Chizuru glanced at him. _

_"__I haven't seen one. So I can't answer that" he glanced at her before redirecting his eyes at the sky ones more. _

_"__If you met one what would you do?" she moved closer to him.

_

_He looked at her and their eyes met. "I'd kill it" _

_"__Even if it's not a bad demon?" there was worry on her voice.

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_"__If I met one I'd decide what to do but now based on what I know about them I won't have second thoughts on killing them if they try to harm us in anyway" he replied, wondering what cause her to ask her those questions. _

_"__So if the demon is good you won't hurt her?" she held unto the edge of his scarf. "or himâ€|" _

_"__Yes but there aren't any reports on good demons" he was about to look away from her when she lifted her skirt to her thigh and removed the gauze from her knee then the cloth that wrapped her sprained ankle. _

_"__Brother" she said in almost a whisper. "What if I told you that I am a demon?"_

* * *

><p>Note: **_Hey there! Thanks for reading and reviews or comments or questions would be really appreciated. They really help fuel the authors mind :3 _

_-So the setting if you noticed is a clash between the future and the past, reason why they use swords while airships exists already as well. _

_-This chapter and the next one would be both flashbacks, I italicized them to differentiate the present to a memory. _

3. Interlude

Interlude

_Saitou Hajime's mouth gaped and his eyes widened as he inspected the wound which was present on Chizuru's knee this morning and the swollen ankle which she sprained. Both injuries were gone. It was impossible but if what she was saying was true, that she is a demon, then healing quickly should only be natural. _

_"__How did that happened?" he needed confirmation and an explanation. He suddenly remembered the time when they first met. She got injured then but upon arriving home she doesn't seem to be in any pain. He didn't read too much into it because other things proved to be more significant at the time but when he thinks about it now, it actually made sense._

_Her lips quivered but she managed to speak. "At first I really didn't remember anything but bits and pieces of my memory came back. I cut myself one day while peeling potatoes and in moments it closed. That was when I started to believe that I amâ€| a demon. I don't know much about myself stillâ€|I mean I'm not sure if I have the strength or speed of a demon" she paused and chuckled. "I think I don't have them thoughâ€|I'm a klutz andâ€|" _

_Hajime interrupted. "That might explain the light I saw the day I found you in the forest" _

_"__Light?" she tilted her head a bit to the side._

_"__Yes" he let out a sigh. "I'm really surprised about this and I don't know what to say." Surprised though isn't the emotion present on his still stoic face. "You look and feel human to me and my mother" _

_"__Demons don't all look like monsters, I guess. I remember that my father looks human, so is my twin brother and the people around our house."_

_"__Probably. Your kind once walked amongst humans" there was a brief silence. "In any case, you don't have to worry" he gave her a small reassuring smile. _

_"__Brotherâ€¦" she sniffed. _

_"__If you're worried I'd do something to harm you then don't because that's the last thing I'd do. You may be a demon but you're also my sister now."_

_"__Will you tell mother?" _

_"__Do you want me to?"_

_"__Not really"_

_"__Then I won't" he stood up. "Do you remember why you were on the forest that day?" _

_"__A bit" Chizuru got up too. "I remembered that my twin brotherâ€¦Kaoru and Iâ€¦ we broke our promise to our father. I don't remember what we did exactly but he was furious at us. We were then sent to an old woman and she told us something about being sent awayâ€¦that's all I remember though" _

_"__So you were exiled?" Hajime kicked a stone which tumbled away and stopped when it hit another. _

She scratched the side of her head. "I don't think so because we were reminded of a number of things which I couldn't remember"

_"__I see" Hajime started walking to the door which was left ajar. "We better get in. It's quite cold tonight and we have to get up early tomorrow. It's market day" _

_Chizuru nodded. "Alright." She ran to his side. "Uhmâ€¦Thank you" he just gave her another curt smile for a reply. She walked to her room with him. "Good night" she beamed before shutting her door.

_

_"__Good night" he replied and headed to his room._

~~~o~~~o~~~o~~~

Chizuru abruptly opened her eyes and turned on her bed. She saw that Hajime was by her feet, his upper body curled next to her on the bed and his feet both touching the ground. It was a very uncomfortable position to sleep in but she didn't want to wake him up when soft snores escaped his gaped lips. He didn't even flinch when she turned and he was a light sleeper most of the time.

She was glad that he can sleep well again. On their way to the captured kingdom they weren't able to rest easy because of the demons that have took residence in the nearby areas. Despite not being on guard every evening, her brother barely sleeps. She somehow feels guilty of how she'd snoozed, sitting next to him, after promising to stay up with him till dawn.

Pushing her thoughts aside, she took a deep breath. She had that dream again, the one where she and her twin brother were sent away. Staring at the ceiling, she closed her eyes and wondered if she can ever see her father and brother again. The memory of the dream started to creep back to her mind and she let it replay.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

_Chizuru stood in her father's room with her twin brother. They held hands and stood closely to each other. Both of them were on the verge of tears as they watched their father pace in front of them. He was fuming in anger and his eyes looked down on them as if he was going to devour them. _

_"__Why did you disobey my orders?" he stopped and regarded the two with a glare. "That room was off limits to you two and you even touched the scroll. How did you two even managed to break the rooms seal?"_

_"__Sorry" they said in unison. _

_"__You can't always apologize for your mistakes, especially if you did something as serious as this. Keeping the scroll safe from the humans had been hard for our ancestors. Do you know what that scroll is?" their father knelt in front of them so that they can see eye to eye. _

The two shook their heads.

_"__It contains everything about our kind. It contains the knowledge on how to make humans strong and it entails that we become slave to them. Only an oracle is allowed to touch the scroll but you two took it out of its sealed case and opened it right?" _

_The two nodded. _

_"__Then you should know that the moment the scroll deteriorated from your hands, the two of you became the scroll" their father closed his eyes, more in despair now than anger. He pulled the two to him and embraced them. "The scroll is not only hunted by humans but by demons on our ranks too. By committing that mistake of breaking your promise to me, not to ever go near that room, you placed your lives in jeopardy. You are of noble pure blood lineage and I couldn't allow you two to die. Also you're my children. But I won't be able to protect you here. Not when I'm surrounded by our enemy."_

_"__Fatherâ€|" the two cried. _

_"__You know that we couldn't trust anyone in this household and soon they'd know that you two messed with the scroll. We have to get you out of hereâ€|"I'd have to send you away"_

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Hajime turned on the bed but stopped moving the instant his arm hit something. Groggily opening his eyes with a small yawn, he learnt that he didn't manage to creep back to his room last night to sleep.

He slowly sat up and stared at the floor for several minutes thinking about nothing at all before he finally decided to get up and have a quick warm shower. Before leaving the room Chizuru turned, making her right arm dangle on the side of the bed. He waited a bit for her to wake up but she didn't. He thought that he should wake her up but she really could use some extra sleep so he left the room quietly and got ready for the day.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

A wave of laughing and chattering filled the garden, in hues of green and white, next to the old but well-kept inn where the group of demon slayers decided to sleep in for the night. Each men present in the area had a brown pouch filled with gold coins and each talked about what they'd do with it and their excitement to get back home soon. The commander who stood in front of the band of slayers clapped his hands once to get everyone's attention. On an instant everyone was silent. Of course the last thing they'd want was to anger their commander.

"Everyone. Our three consecutive missions were taxing but we reaped good rewards from them" Hijikata gave his men a smile. "I hope that you spend them well, you work and even risked your life for every piece of gold in those pouches. In six months well see each other again in Grayhall. We'd stay there for a week and anyone who doesn't show up by then would be left behind. As usual, no show means you no longer want to continue journeying with the group hence your membership would instantly be forfeited. In the event that anyone couldn't make it in time for a good reason, you should send your division captain a letter with your reason" he paused. "With that take care on your journey and try not to get yourselves killed while on vacation. I'm looking forward to seeing everyone well in the future"

The men replied with laughter. When the laughter died down some men started to leave while others went to the commander to thank him for guiding and taking care of them. The commander was known to everyone as strict and his stern face would make anyone think twice before approaching him but despite that his men looks up to him with well-deserved respect.

Once everyone has gone their own way the commander walked back to the inn and passed by the kitchen to get something for late lunch.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Chizuru eyed the red and black cards in front of her then glanced at Sano, Shinpachi and Kazama who sat next to her. Across her was Heisuke with her brother to his left followed by Souji and Yamazaki. All four scanned the cards in front of them. Sannan who sat in between the other end of the two rows cleared his throat and the tension in the room escalated.

"Ace of spades" Sannan announced and quickly hands tried to grab the said card. Shinpachi triumphantly held the card over his head and grinned at Souji who almost fell on the floor face first as he tried to take the card.

The players didn't really have enough time to react when the next



card was announced. "Nine of Hearts" Sannan said as he crossed his arms, feeling amused with somehow having the power to make them panic.

Chizuru smiled at Sano who managed to grab the card with her. They held the card in front of them to show the other two that they got it first before placing it in between them.

"Seven of clubs" the judge of the game announced.

Kazama smirked as he held the said card in between his fingers.

"Ten of Diamonds"

This time there was a squeal. Chizuru ended up lying on top of the cards as she failed to keep her balance while trying to get the card before her brother can. Everyone laughed as she picked herself up with a red face then arranged the cards which she disturbed.

Seeing that everything is set, Sannan wasted no time and announce the next card. "Queen of Spades"

Yamazaki was staring at that specific card just before it was announced and had a gut feel that it would be called next. The card was closer to Kazama and the man had a longer reach than him, so on the instant that the card was called he swiped the card away with his bare feet and sent it flying up over Sannan's head. Kazama who was very competitive wasted no time and tried to reach for the card but Yamazaki managed to push himself up faster. The card was in Yamazaki's hand but his head bumped with Kazama and they both fell on Sannan who didn't have the chance to move away. There were gasps and laughter in the room. As if on cue the door slid open.

"What do you have in that head of yours Yamazaki?" Kazama grunted as he got up, patting his forehead.

Yamazaki didn't even heard Kazama as his eyes met those of their commander who frowned a bit with the scene before him.

"What's happening here?" Hijikata inquired as he stepped into the room and looked around to see if everyone was present.

Sannan sat up and regained his composure after Yamazaki got off him and returned to his place. "Just playing some cards" he held up a card with a small smile.

Hijikata didn't really mind if they play around as long as they were present and on time for the meeting. "I can see that" he said as he took a seat on the other end of the two rows across Sannan.

"Then don't ask" Kazama uncrossed his legs and extended one of it comfortably.

"Tsk." Hijikata crossed his arms and sighed. He wasn't really in the mood to argue with Kazama who always tries to piss him off. "So let's talk about the things we have to do before actually getting some vacation as well." He paused and waited until everyone cleared the cards which scattered in the middle of the group. "Sannan and Yamazaki you'll be in charge of the remaining payments we gathered this time. Make sure that the home is still sturdy and the kids eat

thrice a day. Also try talking to the city mayor if maybe he could give some support to the kids who wishes to pursue higher education or those who are looking for a job."

Sannan nodded. "Consider it done"

"After accomplishing your task you can also start your vacation" Hijikata then swept a look at everyone. "The rest, you're going with me to Aldcrest. As you remember the king of the country housed us for a month when we got caught in a snow storm last year and provided us with free food and medication"

"But we did killed demons for him" Souji added.

"Yes we did but he invited us to attend the upcoming international conference that would be held in the capital" Hijikata explained. "You see Aldcrest is one of the oldest countries. It wasn't always the strongest but they did well in economic terms and managed to secure good alliances and influence this last decade. This year the Western Alliance decided to held the conference in their capital"

"Wow. So you're bringing us to attend some boring conference. Can't you do that yourself" Kazama lighted his pipe.

Hijikata furrowed his brows. "I'm not finished yet, so shut it" he shot a sharp glance at Kazama. "We aren't the only ones invited in the conference four other group of demon hunters would be present. We would be asked to report to the country leaders about the status between the two kinds. In truth I agreed to this because it might get us new assignments."

"Well, we really need a lot more money to buy ourselves an airship" Shinpachi grinned.

"We do but aside from that we were also asked to personally guard the king's daughter" Hijikata added.

"Ohâ€|isn't this getting interesting" Souji grinned. Kazama chuckled as if in agreement to Souji.

"She'd be attending half of the events in the weeklong conference and there has been a conspiracy lately in the palace. Taking out the princess would force the king to take an heir to the throne from the other branches of the family. Probably it would even push him to take another wife"

"Isn't the king quite old to knock someone up?" Kazama allowed the smoke to slowly escape his lips.

"That's none of our business." Hijikata grunted. "Anyway, rumor has it that a demon was hired to take out the princess"

"Why hire a demon when there are tons of good mercenaries out there who can do the job?" Souji tilted his head toward the commander.

"That part wasn't included in the request letter but we'll find out once we get there" Hijikata replied.

Sano scratched his chin. "So the king trusts us that much huh?"

"I believe so." Hijikata stood up. "We'd take an airship across the sea since it's faster than a ship and then we'd take a train to Aldcrest"

"When are we leaving?" Shinpachi inquired.

"Tonight" the commander replied.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Note: <strong>\_Ugh...late update because I was so busy lately. Anyway, guys thanks a bunch for the reviews and the follows.  
:3\_

#### 4. Off the Ground

**\*\*Off the ground\*\***

Heisuke climbed up the ladder connecting the bottom part of the bunk bed to the one on top after removing his shoes. He watched as Souji, who was occupying the space below him, open a bag of chips. The snack was then handed to him after the owner took enough to fill his palm. After taking his share he reached down to offer some to Saitou who occupied the bed next to Souji but Saitou refused.

"This beats sleeping on the forest floor on so many levels and this airship is really nice" Shinpachi threw his bag on the lower half of the bunk bed on the other side of the room then stretched up with a yawn. His eyes scanned the room and remembered his own room back home, the white frame of the beds, the blue sheets and blankets and the woolen gray curtains that covered each bunk, except for the fact that his room was in clutter.

Kazama who sat in the bed next to Shinpachi slowly blew smoke from his barely parted lips. "The beds in that inn are no different that the forest floor." He dropped the ashes from his long antique looking pipe in the ashtray on top of the bedside table. "I barely got a wink of sleep last night"

"I sure hope the rooms they'd provide us in Aldcrest are decent" Sano added.

Shinpachi was about to say something when commotion started on the other side of the room. Souji was standing tossing a pack of sanitary pads from one hand to another with a smirk. Heisuke was laughing hard that his face turned red. Saitou stood up and snatched the pack from Souji and stuffed it back in his bag.

"Why the hell do you carry those around?" Kazama raised a brow.

The door opened and the commander walked in. He noticed that Saitou's ears, nose and cheeks were dusted with light shades of pink. "What's happening here?"

"He's carrying around a pack of sanitary pads" Heisuke said as he finally managed to stop laughing.

"Please tell me they're not yours" Shinpachi added.

"Of course, they aren't mine" Saitou finally spoke.

Sano beamed. "Wow, you should be given a brother of the year award for carrying your sister's personal things"

Souji patted Saitou's back. "Chizuru is really lucky to have a brother as doting as you, I'm a bit jealous" he chuckled.

Saitou glanced at Hijikata who tossed his bag on the bunk above his before removing his boots then turned to the men across him. "She always forgets to stock up on things like that, so I carry around some extra for emergency" he explained keeping his cool demeanor.

"Don't tell me you're the one who thought her how to use those" Kazama chuckled and was joined by the others, except for Hijikata who climbed up his bunk and was busy looking for something inside his bag.

"I did" Saitou said with a straight face that everyone's attention turned on him, there was a short silence then everyone laughed.

"How'd the heck did you even do that?" Sano let both his feet rest on the ladder by the end of his bed.

Shinpachi took a gulp from his bottled water as he stopped laughing. "Were you also the one who gave her the talk about the birds and the bees because that is really awkward"

"Come on you guys" Hijikata joined the conversation. "You're embarrassing him. Besides when you have daughters someday won't you explain to them those things too? So don't laugh about it"

"I'd let my wife do it of course" Shinpachi replied.

"Besides if it is your daughter then you're the father, that's a completely different situation than when you're the brother." Sano added.

"I was just kidding. A woman from the neighborhood explained things to her." Saitou tried to clear the mess.

"If you're just kidding, you could at least smile while saying it Hajime" Heisuke glanced at the man below him.

"Speaking of Chizuru, why isn't she slumbering with us?" Souji smirked at the commander. "It's quite disappointing really"

Hijikata furrowed his brows as he looked down Souji. "Don't expect me to make her sleep in a room full of men even if one of them is her brother. It's inappropriate for a young woman such as herself to do so"

"Anyway I'm really curious about things" Souji moved closer to the panel that divided his side of the bed from Saitou.

"Hmn?" Saitou turned to Souji.

"I mean you and your 'sister' " Souji smirked and raised a peace sign on both hands, crunching them twice to quote and quote as he said the word sister.

"What do you mean by that?" Saitou, of course, knew where the conversation was going. When they first joined the group he was often teased to be lying about Chizuru being his sister.

"Nothing much" Souji pulled the tip of one of his braid. "She's not really blood related and you two are really close."

"What he wants to ask is if you have a thing for her" Kazama clarified.

"Ewww! That's twisted!" Heisuke exclaimed. "That's incest"

"It isn't" Souji replied.

Saitou sighed. "Please don't put any colors to my relationship with my sister."

"That's enough intrigue you guys. It's none of your business anyway" Hijikata interrupted.

"It is" Kazama replied.

"And why is that?" Hijikata glanced at the blonde.

Souji beamed at the commander. "Because it's interesting!"

Hijikata sighed. "Then don't shout for help when Saitou starts slicing you guys to pieces" he lay back on the bed and closed his eyes hoping to get a decent sleep.

The men laughed.

"So Hajime" Souji began. "What would you do when she finally takes a lover?"

"Why are you asking? Are you interested?" Sano grinned.

Souji chuckled. "Who knows"

"The question though is if Hajime would even allow that" Shinpachi added.

"I will allow it" Saitou removed his scarf and folded it.

"And that's why he's a really cool brother" Sano gave him a thumbs up.

"But he'd have to beat me first on a duel" Saitou added.

"Now the chances of her becoming a spinster just got raised by 50%" Souji smirked.

The topic revolved around the siblings for a bit longer before it turned to Souji's ex-lover then to the food they must try upon getting to Aldcrest. It was already midnight when everyone ran out of

topic to talk or laugh about and decided to get a shut eye.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Chizuru was roused by the sudden escalation in the snore of one of the woman she shared the cabin with. Turning around from the wall, she pushed her tangled hair away from her face and sat up with a slouched back. She thought of waking up the woman to ask her to turn on her side but the woman did just that. Her eyes travelled aimlessly around the room. From the small round window on the wall she can tell that morning just broke. She wanted to go back to bed but knew that a few minutes would turn into hours of sleep. Slowly she got out of bed and headed for the toilet inside the cabin.

After doing her business, she sank her face into the sink filled with lukewarm water. It felt great on her skin and it awakened her senses. Grabbing a towel nearby, she wiped her dripping face before combing her hair with her fingers. She stared at herself in the mirror for minutes. Chocolate brown eyes stared back at her. She carefully runs her fingers on the light fringe that framed her face, parting it a bit to the side. She pondered if she should tie up her hair, braid it or just leave it that way. She chose to leave it as it is. She reached for the transparent glass on the table next to the sink and filled it with water. She drank half of it and spat the other half. She pinched her cheeks and smiled at her reflection before leaving the toilet.

Her roommates were still fast asleep. She was lucky that they were a really friendly bunch. Returning to her bed she slipped on the only other shoes she has aside from her boots. Looking down at the dark blue flats with the silver ribbon made her smile. She loved them and barely wears them, because it was her eighteenth birthday gift from her brother but she couldn't go around barefoot. She grabbed her woolen pastel cardigan and quietly left the room.

"He should be awake by now" she thought of eating breakfast together with her brother as she strolled down the long curved hallway of the airship which was lined with a long horizontal panel of thick plexi glass windows. The seemingly endless horizon were in hues of indigo and lavender belted with a fiery orange or maybe even pinkish yellow line that were set on top of the ocean floor beneath a blanket of mist. She paused and stared out the window in awe, hands stuck on the glass. She wanted to feel closer to the cottony clouds outside. Suddenly, she heard footsteps nearing and averted her gaze from the window to the source of the sound.

"You got up pretty early" Hijikata stopped on his tracks as he spotted the only female member of their group. "What are you doing out here?"

"Ah..." she looked away a bit and gathered the words she needed to reply. "I'm feeling hungry and thought that I could get my brother to eat breakfast with me" she glanced at the commander with a smile.

Hijikata walked closer and stopped a couple of steps from her. "He's still asleep when I left. I'm headed to the dining hall for some coffee. You can join me if you like" he ran his fingers through his raven hair before putting the same hand on his pocket.

Chizuru can feel her cheeks heat up as she nodded to accept the offer. "Sure"

The man started walking and so did she. They walked in silence to the dining hall. On the way she continued to steal glances at the man. He looked pretty relaxed than usual and rested as well. She noticed that he dressed slackly at the moment. His sleeves were rolled to his elbows and the first two buttons of his immaculate white shirt were unfastened and it gave her a peek at his well-toned chest. Quickly she diverted her attention to the ground, her cheeks sprinkled with light hues of pink. It's not like she hasn't seen him with his shirt off but she blamed the serene atmosphere, the soft morning light and the less than arm's length proximity between them for the hammering of her heart.

She silently followed him to one of the booths that lined one side of the hall. A couple of feet to the side of the table, on the wall, were the same horizontal strip of windows that ran throughout the entire area. There were just a few other people on the hall. Soft music played on the background giving some life to the rather quiet place. She glanced out the window then back to the man who sat across her.

"Here" he handed her a one page back to back plastic menu for breakfast.

She took the menu with a curt smile. "Thanks" she absentmindedly scanned the menu and wasn't able to decide on what to eat till a waitress approached.

"I'll have coffee with meal#1" he said to the waitress then looked across the table. "What are you having?"

Chizuru looked up from the menu with a small frown. "I'm not sure" she muttered. "I'll have a sandwich and juice" the waitress was about to write the order down but stopped when the man spoke.

"Choose something more decent than a plain sandwich. You should eat more. We spent quite sometime in the forest eating nothing but preserved supplies. Indulging in something better every once in a while wouldn't hurt."

"Ahâ€¦ wellâ€¦" she covered her face with the menu again. "I'll have pancakes with strawberries, syrup and whipped cream" she beamed at the waitress who wrote down her order. "and a cup of warm milk" When the waitress left there was a short while of silence which she decided to break.

"This airship is really nice, one of the best I've been in so far" she placed both her hands on the table, pulling down the sleeves of her cardigan to cover her hands.

Hijikata smiled. "This one is newly built but the design is quite old. There are many other airships that look far better than this. The best ones are luxury airships"

"Have you ever been to one?" she asked curiously.

He nodded. "Once but I was still a captain then. The former commander

brought me with him on a special assignment and it was an all-expense paid trip" his index finger brushed the handle of the spoon on the table as he reminisced the memory. "It was nice but I didn't really enjoy the excessiveness of the place and the people. Everything was expensive and most people were talking about really shallow things. I'm just not used to luxury probably"

"My brother and I just dreamt of riding an airship before so every airship ride is a repeat of that dream being realized" she gathered her hair to one side, her eyes on the grained brown surface of the table.

Hijikata remembered how Saitou was interrogated about his real relationship with his sister. "You've always been close haven't you?"

Chizuru smiled and looked up. "He took care of me even after losing everything he had. I wasn't even his responsibility because I'm just a stranger who crashed into their home. I'm indebted to him"

"It's been almost a year since you two joined the group right?"

She nodded. "A year in exactly a week from today"

The coffee arrived and so did the milk and sugar. Hijikata dropped a cube of sugar in the drink. "I see. This would also be the first vaca€|" he was interrupted when another cup of coffee was placed next to him, this time not by the waitress but by Kazama.

"Why was I not invited to breakfast?" Kazama smirked. "Would I break the intimate atmosphere?"

"Eh?!" Chizuru blushed.

"Don't start this early" Hijikata scowled.

Kazama slipped on the space next to Chizuru. "So can I join in?"

"Suit yourself" Hijikata muttered as he stirred his coffee. The meal arrived soon after.

"Aren't you going to eat Kazama?" Chizuru inquired before she started to dig into her pancakes.

"I had some snacks with the ship's captain" Kazama then pulled out a small carton of cigar, opened its cover and offered one of the two sticks inside to Hijikata. "One of the finest from my country, compliments from the captain."

Hijikata shook his head in refusal. "Thanks but I'll pass"

"It's hard enough to make you drink and you pass on a good smoke." Kazama took one of the cigars and lighted it with his silver lighter. He savored the taste and smell of the high grade cigar. "Don't fear much for your health. We'd most likely die in battle than in illness anyway"

"You miss your home?" Hijikata inquired after swallowing his food.

Kazama chuckled. "Sure. I miss the family conflict and stupidity of everyone in the family. The captain said that last month he was in our family's turf. Turns out my uncle who claimed the throne just a year ago died. Someone poisoned him"

"That's awful. My condolences" Chizuru glanced to the man beside her.

"The man deserved it." He reached for the ashtray and rested his cigar in it.

"So your family still holds the throne. I'm surprised with how they manage to keep their position despite the family conflict" Hijikata places down his cup and resumed eating.

"It surprises me more how they haven't annihilated each other yet" Kazama smiled. "I'm never going back there. They could claim the land and the power for their own."

"Don't you have a claim over it?" Hijikata inquires.

"I do but don't forget I'm here because I'm not really that welcome there" Kazama picked up his smoke and puffed.

"Huh? Why is that?" Chizuru turned to the man.

Kazama glanced at her and smiled. "It's a long story and boring story that would spoil your mood"

Chizuru just nodded blankly and returned to her food. The two men continued to talk about politics and security. Chizuru was too happy with her food to even give time to listen to them but she was glad to see that the two were talking like friends and were not at each other's throat like usual.

~~~O~~~O~~~O~~~

Saitou entered the dining hall with Okita followed by the trio who were laughing about something. To his surprise he spotted his sister sitting with Kazama and Hijikata. It looks like they had breakfast before anyone else. His eyes met Chizuru's who waved at them to call then over. He acknowledged her with a smile.

Breakfast was good and it passed quickly since everyone was enjoying the food and the early morning discussion about the most random things they could think of. After breakfast everyone went on to take care of their own business. His sister approached him before leaving the dining hall.

"The food here is really great" Chizuru beamed.

"Did you eat well?" he walked closely to her.

She nodded. "I'd like to make pancakes for you when I get the chance"

"Thanks but I'm not that fond of sweets" he turned the corner and glanced at her. "I'm going to the lounge for a while"

"I'm going with you" she raised her hand as if to volunteer. "About the pancakes, I can make them less sweet. No syrups or fruits but that wouldn't taste so good"

He chuckled. "Don't worry too much about what you'll feed me. I always eat anything you make right?"

She pushed the door leading to the lounge. "I know"

Upon entering the room he paused at the news and magazine stand. He took hold of one paper and frowned. In a bit his sister was already standing next to him looking down the paper in his hand wide eyed.

"That's the town next to ours" she muttered upon recognizing the clock tower on the picture.

"It was taken in by a new country" he placed the paper back on the rack. "By now nothing is left of the country I was from. It's quite disappointing" he walked towards a nearby couch and sat down.

Chizuru sat next to her brother and kept her head low. "Brother" she held on to his sleeve like she always does.

"I know" a glance at her and he knows that she remembered the event that changed both their lives years ago. "I have thought of going back after our mission is done"

"Huh?" she looked at him in surprise.

"But I don't think that now is the right time yet" he gave her a small comforting smile.

She sniffed as she tried to hold back her tears. "I think I want to go back to even to just visit mother's grave"

Saitou nodded and closed his eyes. "Me too."

Chizuru focused on the empty couches around them and Saitou kept his eyes closed. The scherzo playing on the background made their heavy heart feel lighter but it didn't keep their memories of that hellish dawn from recurring again.

## 5. Dawn of Nightmares

**\*\*Dawn of Nightmares\*\***

\_Chizuru sat up in panic. She was feeling really cold and she was hyperventilating. The dream she just had was so vivid that she thought she was really in danger. She was about to get out of bed to grab a drink when she heard howling noises outside. She froze and in the stillness of the night she heard screams being carried by the wind. \_

\_"\_Chizuru!" her door busted open and Hajime pulled her by the hand. "We have to go. The demons are attacking the town" \_

\_"\_What?!" she shivered in fear. She may be one of them but it's not

like she can fight them. \_

\_"\_\_Chizuru, Hajime! Come on you two!" their mother called for them from the door. \_

\_Without another word they all exited their home. There was fire in town and they met people fleeing on their way. They didn't have time to take anything. Their mother managed to grab only a cloak and a short sword, Hajime only had his sword with him and she brought nothing with her at all. As they reached the hill they can see their house. Demons who look more like a cross between animals than human roam around it and like any other house in town they broke into it to search for humans to slaughter. They continued on to the path away from the forest. Other people chose to go to the forest but it's like suicide to go there in the dark. \_

\_Chizuru held tightly unto Hajime's hand and tried to keep her fears at bay. Ahead of them other humans also scramble to get as far away as possible. It was already dawn and soon the sun will rise and they would be safe from the beasts. It's not that they can't roam around at day but they are weakened by the light, they are demons on the lower tier after all. \_

\_"\_\_Run back!" their mother suddenly exclaimed. They complied but the three of them froze as the situation wasn't better behind them. Humans are being torn apart like paper dolls. Some are devoured while others are just thrashed mercilessly. They were caught in between two hellish scenes and they would soon be part of the carnage. \_

\_Hajime let loose of Chizuru's hand and pulled out his sword. Looking to his left he saw that his mother did the same. \_

\_"\_\_We would die fighting" Ena smiled at her son, knowing that death is inevitable at this point. "Chizuru. Run. You have to return to your family"\_

\_"\_\_No I won't!" she exclaimed in both fear and panic. The howling, growling, moaning and cracking sounds that filled the air made her head thump like a drum. The smell of death overwhelmed her making her want to vomit and faint but it wasn't time for that. \_

\_"\_\_We won't die mother." Hajime tighten his grip of his sword. He never sunk his blade on something living before. Of course killing is no business for a 13 year old kid but now he has no choice. He felt fear but at the same time an electric sensation run throughout his body and he felt warm and pumped up. Turning to his right he saw that a demon with hooves of a horse and a head of a goat neared. He charged at it, meeting it before it can even reach them. It almost landed a punch at him but he evaded swiftly and regained his stance. It tried hard to catch him but he was faster than the bigger opponent. Ducking and sprinting under the demon's arm when it reached for him, he sliced it's torso in one blow. \_

\_Looking around he saw his mother struggling to push off a demon from her. Her short sword was in battle with the demon's horns and it looks like she isn't winning. He ran to her aid and plunge his sword into the demon's chest.\_

\_"\_\_Mother" he picked her up. \_

\_"\_\_I'mâ€|" she didn't finish what she has to say. She pushed her son away from her and was taken by a large demon. \_

\_"\_\_Moâ€|Mother!" Hajime exclaimed as she watched her getting lifted in the air. He rushed forward to hack at the demon's leg but he was whipped away by its tail. He almost lost consciousness but the horror of seeing his mother in the hands of a filthy demon kept him awake. He couldn't feel his body. He hit the ground too hard. He can hear more howling going their way. It was bad news. \_

\_Chizuru was told to hide behind a boulder, she obeyed but she can't just stand around anymore. She rushed to Hajime who was whipped away and knelt beside him.\_

\_"\_\_Chizuruâ€|run" he told the little girl who was on the verge of tears. \_

\_"\_\_Noâ€|" she muttered and held him down when he tried to get up. "You'll die if you continue to fight"\_

\_"\_\_I canâ€|I still can" his eyes locked on his mother whose right arm just got torn away. Her scream echoed throughout the place. "Mother!" \_

\_On the climax of the situation Chizuru suddenly felt her body pulsate. For a bit all she saw was a bright light and knowledge which she never knew she had rolled into her head. She dropped forward to her brother. Holding the side of her head, a voice spoke to her dictating what she has to do.\_

\_"\_\_Brotherâ€|" she groaned. Suddenly the pain was gone and she was left with a solution to their situation. One that she had no way of defying, since everything in her knows that it's the right thing to do. "Make a pact with me and I'll share with you my power"\_

\_His head turned to Chizuru who just spoke but the voice that came out wasn't hers. "Chizuru?" he groaned feeling the throbbing pain on his side and back. \_

\_"\_\_Make a pact with me and I'll make you strong enough to fight"\_

\_He looked into her hollow eyes. Another scream left his mother's lips, this time he was sure that he couldn't save her but he has to do something. His mind was in a haze and he didn't even thought it through. "Help me fight them all" he sealed his fate. \_

\_"\_\_Of course" with that he was pulled to her and she planted a kiss on his lips. He was surprised and wanted to push her away but excruciating pain coursed through out him. Her fingers seem to be digging to his heart and he couldn't breathe. Despite the pain he felt warm and alive. It was a good kind of pain. It was pain that made him stronger. \_

\_When their lips parted, Chizuru fainted. \_

\_Wasting no time, he was on his feet. A raw kind of destructive energy pulsated in his system. He was no longer afraid. He wanted to sink his blade on every demons flesh and slaughter them the same way they did with the people and his mother. Rushing forward, acting more

on man's primal drive to fight, he chopped the head of the demon that tore his mother. At this point other demons came from town, most still covered with both blood and viscera, to join the party.

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\_Hajime felt like he was dancing through each of the demons, slicing and hacking them. Now it was their turn to perish. He stood his ground and waited for them to come to him. Each of them was no match for his agile movements and fatal blows. The pool of blood which gathered on the ground around him turned into a river. There was no guilt behind his strikes just pure rage and sorrow. So this was how it was to be a demon hunter. This is why his mother didn't want him to become one. \_

\_After striking down his last opponent, he fell on both his knees. For the first time in a long time, he cried.

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\_Chizuru woke up crying. She looked around but the bloodbath banquet that surrounded her before she lost consciousness was gone. The sun just rose and the birds sang their melodies in the trees. She was under an aged tree by a stream and a sight of a mountain she never saw before from the village lay miles from where she was. \_

\_There was no smell of death, no blood and no dead bodies lying around. For a moment she thought that it was all just a bad dream, till she saw Hajime. He was sitting in a chopped tree adjacent to her. He was looking absent minded at the ground. His immaculately white scarf was splattered with blood, his hands were clean but the sleeve of his gray shirt was also covered in blood. In the past there were times when he would look so serious that Chizuru would have second thoughts of approaching him but the grim look on his face scared her. His eyes seem different. They were blank but at the same time seem to have intent to kill the next thing that would pass by him. The sword was clutched tightly in his left hand while the short sword which belonged to his mother rested next to him.

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\_ "\_\_\_Motherâ€|" she muttered then shoots up and looked around for any trace of her but there was none. She muffled her cry by covering her mouth but it got Hajime's attention. "Brotherâ€|" she met him half way and hid her face in his chest. \_

\_He hesitantly placed an arm around her. He doesn't know how to console anyone and he can't even do that to himself. He was a total wreck at the moment and he doesn't think that things would ever be as they were before. Not without his mother. He was done crying but he felt the urge to cry with Chizuru. Swallowing the pain, he decided though that he should be strong for both of them. At the moment she is all he has in the world. \_

\_ "\_\_\_I'm sorryâ€| I didn't do anything to help you" she pulled away from him and wiped her tears with the sleeve of her dress.

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\_ "\_\_\_Actually you did" he remembered the different voice that came from her and that he made a pact with her to make him strong enough to fight the demons. "Don't you remember?"\_

\_"\_\_Huh?" she looked at him in confusion. \_

\_"\_\_I see" \_

\_"\_\_Did I do something?"\_

\_He shook his head. "Not really. I'll speak about it to you next time but for now we have to keep going" He knew that making a deal like that would require something from him in return but since Chizuru doesn't seem to remember anything he'd have to wait. \_

\_"\_\_Where are we going?" she really wanted to ask about their mother but she can't find it in her to open up the topic. Not now, when both of them are still shaken from the horror of the events the night before. \_

\_"\_\_I don't know" he looked towards the mountain. "but we have to keep moving. I just want to go far away" \_

\_Chizuru took his right hand in hers. It was obvious to her that the experience changed him but she was glad that she can still feel the warmth in his hand "Alright. I'll stay with you and would never leave your side brother" \_

\_He gave her a curt nod then started walking towards the direction that would lead them to the next chapter of their life.

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"Isn't there any other option other than a six hour train ride to Aldcrest?" Heisuke leaned to the window and looked out the green spread of land that extended on both sides.

"Yeah. A three day trekking to Aldcrest" Shinpachi paused then continued chewing at his food.

Chizuru peaked at the train compartment where the trio and Kazama were seated. "Hello" she greeted everyone with a smile.

"Finally got bored with the happy company?" Kazama smirked at her.

"I just remembered that I was given a pack of these dried fruits" she lifted the pack up to show everyone the assortment. "Here, you can have it" she extended handed it to Shinpachi who beamed at the sight of food.

"THANKS!" Heisuke snatched the pack from Shinpachi and opened it quickly. He popped one into his mouth. "Yummy!"

"I thought you weren't feeling fine?" Sano snatched the pack from him and took some for himself.

"Chizuru gave them and it would be impolite to not show appreciation by eating them right away" Heisuke beamed.

"I'm going back now" Chizuru smiled and was about to leave when Kazama reached for her arm to stop her from leaving. "Eh?" she turned

to the man.

"Let's play a quick game before you leave" Kazama tossed a coin and caught it with his left hand.

"What game?" Chizuru focused on the coin in Kazama's hand.

"Hijikata really gives high regards to your hawk like vision, so why don't we test that" Kazama masterfully made the coin tumble in between the cracks of his fingers. "Everyone knows I have magic fingers, if not magic hands. I'm confident to say that they're fast and they'reâ€¦ well good at things"

Sano rested his face on his palm. "I think I know what game this is" he pushed three of the empty sauce dish used by Shinpachi towards Kazama who covered the coin with one of them then overturned the other two.

"You just have to guess where the coin would end up" Kazama explained. "If you guess it right I'd be at your service for the rest of the mission but if you're wrongâ€¦ wellâ€¦ you'd have to kiss me"

"WHAAATT!?" Heisuke shoot up.

"Waitâ€¦ Iâ€¦ I can't possibly do that" Chizuru didn't want to participate but Sano pulled her down to sit next to him.

"Just give it a try." He flashed a smile at her. "We'd want to know if a pure blood is indeed better than a half blood."

"Wait! You're going to allow this?!" Heisuke protested.

"Calm down and have a little faith in Chizuru!" Shinpachi stood from his seat and pushed Heisuke down to his.

"Besides, it's just a kiss. No one's going to die from that" Kazama's smile turned mischievous.

"Butâ€¦" Chizuru tried to protest but Kazama interrupted.

"Let's begin" he stated and his hands started moving the sauce dish rapidly from one position to the other.

Chizuru focused on the coin and watched where it would go. She was aware that at times he would slightly leave the edge of the sauce dish elevated to slip the coin from one dish to the other. Her eyesight was indeed sharp, better than a normal human. This is one of the abilities that were left with her since she shared the other half of it with her brother who can use the abilities only when direly needed. She didn't have many abilities to begin with but she was a noble pure blood, so she was still special in a way. Kazama on the other hand was a half-blood but he was strong and fast. He was actually more demon than she is if skills were assessed and this game is one of his forte since it requires speed.

Suddenly, Kazama stopped. His eyes locked with Chizuru's, who was holding her breath all the while.

"So, where is the coin now?" he inquired and glanced at the other

three who surely had their own answers.

Chizuru was in doubt but she was sure that the coin was no longer under any of the dishes. "It not in any of them"

"Hmn?" Kazama smirked. "Then where is it?"

"In your sleeve" she pointed into his right buttoned sleeve.

"Really?" Kazama opened his sleeves and shook his arms. Nothing fell. "Guess you're wrong. In fact it's here" he lifted the middle sauce dish and revealed the coin.

"Impossible" Chizuru's eyes widened. "I saw you slip it out and slid it down your sleeve"

"Maybe you saw wrong" Kazama confidently stated as he opened the two other dishes.

"AHHHH! Chizuru run!" Heisuke exclaimed, knowing that Chizuru would have to give Kazama a kiss.

"Eh?" Chizuru froze as she remembered the consequence. "Butâ€¦"

"Now about that kiss" Kazama leaned forward.

"Hey cut it out" Shinpachi demanded.

"For all we know this might be her first kiss" Sano teased.

"Ahâ€¦ehâ€¦ wellâ€¦" Chizuru blushed. "I'm sorryâ€¦I'll do anything just not this"

Kazama laughed. "Eh? Anything?"

"Kazama you perv!" Heisuke stood up.

"Think about it. To have your first kiss taken by me isn't so bad" Kazama continued to urge.

"No way!" Chizuru got up to leave but as she did Kazama pulled her close. For a moment she was sure that she was going to get kissed but instead of Kazama's lips, her lips landed on the back of someone's palm. Looking to her side, she paled. "Brother!" she exclaimed, moving away from Kazama.

"Sorry for interrupting" Saitou stared daggers at Kazama who immediately wiped his lips with a tissue.

"You always have to come around at a perfect time, don't you?" Kazama crossed his arms with a smile to taunt Saitou.

"Yes. That's my job" Saitou took hold of Chizuru's wrist. "Now if you'll excuse us"

"Brotherâ€¦" she muttered as she got dragged away. "I'm sorry" she felt panic surge in her as she saw a slight frown on his expressionless face.

"Do you like him?" he inquired in a stern manner.

"Eh! No! I don'tâ€¦I mean not in that way" she turned beet red with the question.

"I'm not against you liking someone. You're already an adult so it's normal but don't give in too easily to men and their advances"

"I know" she replied weakly. She felt his grip loosen as they reached their compartment. Souji was laughing and their commander kept a straight face.

"Chi-zu-ru" Souji turned to her. "I thought you weren't coming back. I was getting tired of talking to myself"

Chizuru slipped into the couch after her bother and just responded to Souji with a smile.

"Let's play cards" Souji fished out a deck of cards from his double breasted military jacket.

"Sure" Chizuru nodded in agreement then remembered what happened to her earlier. "But no consequences for the loser alright"

Souji chuckled. "Don't worry. This is just to pass time" he nudged Hijikata who sat silently next to him. "You're playing too"

"Fine" he picked up the cards that were tossed to him.

Chizuru stole a glance at her brother which he caught. She looked away quickly.

"I'm not angry." He said in almost a whisper and watched as she smiled warmly at him in relief. _"Maybe it's time for me to learn how to let you go"_ he thought as he checked the cards in his hand. _"It's not like I believe the fortuneteller but the day might come when our paths would lead us apartâ€¦but till that day I'll keep my promise" _

End
file.